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THE SOVIET PENITENTIARY SYSTEM:  
EVOLUTION OF CONCENTRATION CAMPS  
(Le Systeme Concentrationnaire Sovietique)

By Paul Barton Le Contrat Social, Jul-Aug, 1961, pp. 223-230.

After the death of Stalin, the Soviet concentration camps delivered -- over a period of three years -- their secret to the non-communist world. Many foreigners regained their freedom, and most of them were even repatriated.

By these means, it was learned that the system of forced labor had been seriously damaged by the effects of an alarming population problem which henceforth made mass deportations impossible, by the crisis in authority following the death of Stalin, and by the strikes and insurrections which took place in the camps after the end of 1952. The returnees also brought information on the measures intended to reduce the mortality among the inmates, to rationalize their work, and to reduce the congestion in the camps by cutting down the strengths and modifying the system of control. But since the repatriation of the inmates from the non-communist countries had nearly been completed by 1956, when the process of transformation was hitting its stride, little was known about its final outcome. The men in power took advantage of the situation to claim glory for reforms which had been imposed on them by the over-all situation and by the revolt of their victims. In official statements, the changes which have occurred have been presented in more and more slanted form.

Nevertheless, from time to time events occur which are revealing. Further, a legal text-book, The Soviet Law of Corrective Labor, appeared in Moscow in 1960 under the direction of Prof. B. S. Outevski, which after more than 30 years constitutes an authority in this field (no book of this type has been published since 1936). True, the work swarms with euphemisms and superfluous assertions; a number of prickly questions are treated in deliberately obscure language, or even passed over in silence. But nevertheless, it is an abundant source of information for anyone familiar with the Soviet camps and the esoteric language of their inhabitants.

#### The Detainees

The number of detainees in the concentration camps has greatly diminished since 1953. The testimony of the majority of the returnees leaves no doubt on this score. It is impossible to give in figures, even approximately, the importance of this diminution. Certain concentration "complexes" lost the majority of their inmates. In others, the process took much smaller proportions. There were also some where the strength had not stopped growing at the time the foreigners departed. Besides, even there, where the decrease was most spectacular, it was not due only to the liberation of prisoners: transferrals into other penal establishments played a not unimportant role.

Various facts reported by the repatriates lead to the conclusion that, simultaneously with the reduction in strength, there was being carried out a transfer of a part of this strength to camps located further east. Ukrainians involved in the disturbances in Karaganda in 1952 were transferred to Norilsk. A certain number of those who took part in the uprising at Norilsk, in the spring of the following year, were sent to Taishet, where some of the strikers from Vorkuta also arrived. Following the revolt which broke out in 1954 at Kinguir (sic) in Kazakhstan, Kolyma received a large contingent of prisoners from that camp. At the same time, the reduction in strength seemed to decrease as one went eastward; the Japanese released from Kolyma at the end of 1956 estimated that the number of detainees in that enormous concentration complex in Northeast Siberia remained unchanged. One returnee, confined at Taishet from 1953 to 1956, reported that he had the impression that the penal administration was trying to stabilize the manpower at Kolyma by means of a system of "exchange" with the camps at Taishet: some prisoners, chosen among the strongest, were often sent from Taishet to Kolyma, while a goodly number of worn-out men, sick men or cripples, travelled the same road in the opposite direction.

Moreover, the diminution in the number of detainees at the camps was accompanied by an increase in those in the prisons. It appears that they undertook the construction of a whole series of new prisons, and expansion of some of the old ones. The detainees at the prisons were compelled to do forced labor, in conditions even more severe than in the camps (cf. Izvestia,

13 September 1956, and The Soviet Law of Corrective Labor, pp. 187-202). A portion of the prisoners were transferred from the camps to the prisons in reprisal for the uprisings and were given additional sentences for "banditism in camp." The field of application of the sentence to prison was considerably extended by the "Principles of penal legislation of the USSR and the Federated Republics," promulgated on 25 December 1958. This sentence was to apply to "persons having committed grave crimes" and "particularly dangerous multiple offenders." The handbook by Professor Outevski sees in this innovation a "reinforcement of the penal repression of grave crimes" (p. 88). The person presenting the law to the Supreme Soviet explained that the end in view was an "increase in accountability for the gravest crimes against the state and for crimes against the life or health of citizens." Political prisoners and assassins were placed, once again, in the same bag.

In any case, if one were to believe the official declarations, there are no more political detainees. Already in May 1957, two high officials had stated to Professor Harold J. Berman of Harvard University that as a result of the amnesties and rehabilitations, political prisoners represented only a little under 2% of the total number of prisoners, and that these were traitors guilty of "crimes against Soviet citizens in collaboration with the Germans" (news-papers of 16 May 1957). Bold claims these, soon proven false by testimony reporting the presence, in various concentration complexes, of Polish detainees; a Frenchman, freed at the beginning of 1958, was in contact up until the end of his detention with partisans from the Caucasus and the Ukraine who continued to flow into the prison at Vladimir for having refused to publicly renounce their ideas of national independence (Jean-Paul Serbet, Polit-isolator, Paris 1961, p. 417).

At the beginning of 1959, Khrushchev thought it possible to rid himself of the two per cent in question: "Today in the Soviet Union there are no more cases of indictments for political crimes," he declared at the 21st Congress. And even further: "As I have already said, there are now in our country no political detainees in the prisons". These words were spoken one month after the promulgation of the law on penal responsibility for crimes against the state which specified, among other crimes, high treason, terrorism, sabotage, agitation and anti-Soviet propaganda, participation in an anti-Soviet organization, mass disorders, illegal departure for foreign countries, and which laid down for the majority of these political misdeeds penalties running from 10 years confinement to death. Khrushchev's statements were repeated at the same Congress by the chief of the secret police, A. Shelyapin, who however immediately contradicted them by shouting: "We will continue to punish pitilessly all the enemies of our people."

Moreover it has been known for a long time that there were in the Soviet Union no detainees officially described as political; there were only enemies of the people, traitors, saboteurs, counter-revolutionaries, etc.

A strong light was thrown on this question by the outcome of the Pasternak affair. Less than three months after the death of the writer, the woman who had provided the inspiration for the heroine of Doctor Zhivago, Olga Ivinskaya, was arrested. The facts which provided the pretext for this are known thanks to the story of Sergio d'Angelo, who had served as intermediary between Boris Pasternak and his foreign editor. Expelled from the Soviet Writers' Union, and deprived of his source of livelihood, Pasternak had requested the transfer of a part of his author's royalties. Once the hope of arranging the transfer officially had vanished, he asked to have the money sent secretly, and instructed Olga Ivinskaya to accept delivery of it. The sums received by her were transferred intact to Pasternak. After the death of the writer, she received, in conformity with the desires of the deceased, a certain sum for herself. In order to justify her arrest and her condemnation, several defamatory versions of the story were put successively in circulation: she was charged with having persuaded Pasternak not to have the money sent through official channels; on another occasion, with having injured the writer himself, as well as his legitimate heirs, by an improper appropriation of funds; or again, of having speculated on the poetic works of certain students.

Olga Ivinskaya was not to be judged for political crime. Following a secret trial, she was condemned in December 1960 to eight years confinement, and her daughter to three years, in accordance with Article 15 of the law of 25 December 1958 on penal responsibility for crimes against the state, described as follows:

Contraband, that is to say the illegal transport of merchandise or other values across the state frontier of the USSR, conducted

by means of the concealment of the objects in special hiding places, or with the aid of fraudulent use of customs certificates or otherwise, or on a grand scale, or by a group of persons who are organized for purposes of contraband, or by an official using his official position, as well as the contraband of explosive materials, narcotics, caustics, poisons, of arms and of military equipment, is punished by deprivation of freedom for a period running from three to 10 years, with confiscation of property.

Officially, then, Olga Ivinskaya is not a political prisoner.

Boris Pasternak foresaw this contemptible vengeance. He had predicted it in the fate of Lara after the death of Yuri Zhivago: "One day, Larissa Fedorovna left and did not return. No doubt she was arrested in the street. She was to die or disappear no one knows where, forgotten under the anonymous number of a lost list, in one of the countless concentration camps of the North." By transforming the foresight of the poet into reality, the men in power made these lines a real message: the act which they have just perpetrated took place, in the novel, under Stalinist terror, which they claim to have relegated forever to the past.

#### Penal Administration

Official reports on the penal administration vary considerably. In May 1957 the two high officials questioned by Professor Harold J. Berman stated that the famous Gulag, the administration of camps under the Ministry of Interior, had been dissolved by a decision of the Council of Ministers dated 25 October 1956 and replaced by Guitk, the administration of colonies of corrective labor. Now no decree of this type had been published, and no one spoke of it thereafter. In a report presented in May 1957 to a conference on the law of corrective labor, the Minister of Interior described at length the reforms of the penal administration without breathing a word of that which had been described to Professor Berman (Soviet Justice, 1957, no. 8, and The Soviet State and the Law, 1957, no. 12). The information provided by his subordinates to the American visitor was evidently false.

In his report, the Minister declared that the penal institutions had been subject to the direct supervision of the Minister of Interior, that henceforth they would be the responsibility of the regional, municipal, and district presidiums of Soviets, and that the local Soviets and the Councils of Ministers of the Republics were responsible for directing their work. He did not specify the date of this change, of which one cannot find a trace in the legal texts.

If one is to believe the 1960 handbook, the control of all establishments for corrective labor was given in 1957 to the Ministers of Interior of the federated republics, and to the administrations of internal affairs connected with the presidiums of the regional and district Soviets (The Soviet Law of Corrective Labor, p. 48). Not to the Presidiums of the Soviets, but to the organs of the police. In any case, more than a year after the reform described in the manual, the government issued the "Regulation for colonies of corrective labor and prisons of the Ministry of Interior;" the penal establishments came then, after the reform as before, under the Ministry of Interior. The statements to the contrary were intended, to all appearance, to conceal the existence of the central administration, in order to create the impression that following the changes carried out, forced labor had become an unimportant matter.

The fate of this administration after the liquidation of the Ministry of Interior, decided in January 1960, is not known. One must suppose, until more fully informed, that it was kept in Moscow, close to the Council of Ministers.

The supposed transfer of duties probably only introduced the intermediary of the appropriate regional services between the central administration and the prisons, colonies, and camps. Until then, the concentration installations were directly dependent on Moscow, thus creating, especially in the most remote regions, states within the state. Thus the Minister of Interior stated in his May 1957 report that the reorganization was designed to further "a real control of the distant establishments." In the same spirit, the rule according to which the public ministry should control all penal institutions was reaffirmed in 1955 (cf. V.S. Tadevossian, The Control Exercised by the Prosecutor in the USSR, Moscow, 1956, pp. 256-270) and the control commissions associated with the local Soviets were reestablished in the course of 1957 (The Soviet Law of Corrective Labor, pp. 123-128). All these changes form an integral part of the measures taken by Stalin's successors to regain control of the police, which had become too independent.

Professor Outevsky's handbook expresses the same concern, but giving it a character which it does not possess:

In connection with the observation of socialist legality in the work of the corrective labor establishments, it should be noted above all that there is no legality peculiar to their work. Socialist legality is a single whole (p. 12).

Actually, the principle of legality scarcely manifests itself in the Soviet penal system. Theoretically the functioning of the latter is ruled by the Corrective Labor Code of 1933, but that is a dead letter, and has not been applied for a long time. In February 1957 and in December 1958, several representatives spoke in the Supreme Soviet of the necessity to establish new legislation in this field: their speeches had no effect.

On the other hand, the "Regulation for colonies of corrective labor and prisons of the Ministry of Interior," adopted in 1958, is a secret document. The only reason why we know of its existence is that the Prosecutor General, R. A. Rudenko, mentioned it during his remarks at the Supreme Soviet in December 1958. The authors of the handbook do not seem themselves to be aware of its provisions; at least they say nothing about them.

Finally, the concept of sources of law is so defined as to include practically any administrative act: The Soviet Law of Corrective Labor attributes this characteristic not only to laws and decrees, but also to rules, decisions and explanatory notes from the Ministries of Interior and their organs, as well as to orders, instructions, and decisions of the local administrations (pp. 55-56). At the meeting convened in Moscow in May 1957 to study the problems of this legal field of study, one of the speakers was even heard to say that it was not advisable to limit too greatly the police power, as exercised in the camps: strictly legal texts should not determine in a precise way their internal organization and functioning, but only the "fundamental problems" of their activity, leaving all the rest to administrative decisions (The Soviet State and the Law, 1957, no. 12.) In its turn, the handbook specifies that "the activity of the institutions of corrective labor should not be weakened in any way" (p. 5).

#### From Camps to Colonies

For the last few years, the spokesmen of Soviet power have been proclaiming from the roof-tops that corrective labor camps no longer exist, that they have been replaced by corrective labor colonies. This reform, if it were real, would involve a significant improvement in the situation of the prisoners. Colonies, in the past reserved for those serving sentences of less than three years, differed considerably from the camps. They were not indeed a humanitarian institution, but the rules there were less strict, the material conditions less painful, and in general, these establishments were not located in distant areas. But if one searches the official declarations for some information on this transformation, one only finds inconsistencies, evasions, or statements which are obviously false.

In May 1957, in the course of their talk with Professor Berman, the two high officials stated that the decision to suppress the camps had been taken by the Council of Ministers on 25 October 1956. The handbook by Outevski also mentions that decision, but lets it be understood that the camps continued nevertheless to exist. In an ambiguous passage (pp. 80-81), it lists first the various types of installations in the penal system prior to the promulgation of the "Principles of penal legislation in the USSR and the Federated Republics" and of the "Regulation for corrective labor colonies and prisons." The camps are included in this list. But the "Principles" and the "Regulation" were promulgated in December 1958, thus more than two years after the decision of 25 October 1956. A new list of penal establishments follows, introduced by a tortuous sentence which betrays great embarrassment:

After it had been judged not useful in 1956 to maintain corrective labor camps in the system of places for deprivation of freedom, and also after the promulgation in 1958 of the Principles of penal legislation in the USSR and the federated Republics, and the Regulation for corrective labor colonies and prisons of the Ministry of the Interior of the USSR /the following establishments/ were to be included in the system of places for deprivation of freedom.

The camps did not appear in this second list. It does not by any means follow that they disappeared after December 1958. The phrase employed, "were to be included" (stali ykhodit) is deliberately ambiguous.

This is not the only place where The Soviet Law of Corrective Labor tries to give the impression that the camps had been eliminated, while avoiding making an explicit statement to that effect. Other evasive formulas are used later on:

The Principles of penal legislation in the USSR and the federated Republics, like the Regulation for corrective labor colonies and prisons, no longer mention the camps of corrective labor. That is quite comprehensible. As is known, among the actions intended to lighten the work of the organs of the Ministry of Interior, it was judged not useful to prolong the existence of the camps of corrective labor, and it was decided on that occasion to reorganize them into colonies of corrective labor. (pp. 82-83)

Once again, "it was judged," "it was decided," etc. were used to avoid saying yes, the reorganization of the camps into colonies had effectively taken place, or no, it had not. Further, the authors do not think of condemning the institution itself. At the most, they admit that there were infractions of legality "as a result of the enemy activity of Beria and his accomplices" (p. 45). Their attempts at justification extend to calling the camps "a sharp, but humane arm of the Soviet State" (p. 83), which does not at all suggest that the camps belong to the past. Perhaps the authors themselves do not know what to say; after all, they are only lawyers.

These contradictions and evasions are not without precedent. The handbook compares the supposed reorganization of the camps into colonies to the liquidation of the "insulators for special employment," set up in 1924 for particularly dangerous political prisoners, which ceased to exist after the creation in 1930 of the camps of corrective labor (p. 45). Now, when Soviet sources speak of the liquidation of these insulators, it should thereby be understood that their importance greatly diminished, but not that they entirely disappeared. J.-P. Serbet, for instance, reports that the famous prison of Vladimir has a special section where the detainees are submitted to complete isolation: they are put in solitary confinement, never go out into the yard, have practically no contact with the guards, who are forbidden to talk to them.

Man here becomes a serial number. He does not have the right to pronounce his own name; when necessary, he shows the guard a piece of cardboard with his number on it. Two prisoners--a former Gestapo official and a Hungarian who had formed during the war, in his country, part of an agent net running from London--were transferred in March 1954 to an ordinary cell after having passed four and six years respectively in this special section; during the last year, as a special favor, they shared the same cell. Serbet, who met them shortly after their transfer, relates that according to their account the isolation cells were occupied at the beginning of 1953 by a dozen doctors implicated in the "Doctors' Plot," as well as a number of political or religious personalities and certain high officials (op. cit, pp. 372-380).

This precedent may indicate the path followed in the evolution of the camps of corrective labor under the secret decision of the Council of Ministers of 25 October 1956. Here and now these camps lost a part of their inmates by releases and the transfer into the prisons of those prisoners considered most dangerous. If one completed these measures by the dispatching of the least dangerous to colonies of corrective labor, it might be that the camps would one day come to lose their "official existence." In the USSR, there are not a few things which have no official existence. One such has been mentioned already: political prisoners.

The Soviet Law of Corrective Labor provides valuable information, although very incomplete, on the conditions under which the prisoners live. Through this data, there can be discerned another way of making the camps disappear: by changing their name.

#### Detention Regimen

The generic term of "colony" is applied to three types of penal establishments, which are distinguished from each other by the regimen of detention as well as by the material situation of the detainees. There is a "general



regimen, "a "mild regimen," and a "severe regimen," and the men under these regimens cannot be mixed, each establishment being devoted exclusively to one of them (op. cit., pp. 100, 101, 179 and 182). For each convict, the regimen he will undergo is prescribed immediately after his conviction (p. 181). The degree of "social danger" which he presents, the "character of the crime committed by him," age, sentence, previous convictions, etc., are taken into consideration (p. 182). After serving a specified part of his sentence, the prisoner may be transferred to a milder regimen if his conduct and work are considered satisfactory; a stricter regimen may be inflicted on him as punishment (pp. 179 and 180).

The general regimen of the colonies (pp. 179-180 and 183-185) follows the same rules that in the past were followed by the general regimen of the camps of corrective labor (cf. Paul Barton, L'Institution concentrationnaire en Russie, 1930-1957, Paris 1959, pp. 152-158).

The mild regimen, particularly stressed by the handbook (pp. 180-181), is relatively recent. It was put in effect beginning in the Spring of 1954, as a result of the strikes and uprisings of the preceding year; on the decision of the camp administration, those prisoners who had completed a third of their sentence and who were giving evidence of a satisfactory "reformation" were eligible to enjoy it.

On the subject of the severe regimen, The Soviet Law of Corrective Labor, speaks very briefly:

The severe regimen is distinguished from the general regimen by an increase in the requirements which the detainees must satisfy, and by the rigor of the system of their detention. The detainees submitted to the severe regimen are placed under the strictest conditions of isolation, which absolutely exclude the possibility of living outside the zone /area of the colony/, or of work and movement without escort.

The right to receive packages, letters, and visits is more limited (p. 185). The difference between the general regimen and the severe regimen also affects the methods of surveillance and the number of guards, the quality of quarters, commissaries, and dispensaries, the food, and the nature of work assigned (pp. 181, 185, 224, 216, 218, and 190). According to the statements of a lawyer attending the meeting devoted to the law of corrective labor in May 1957, the severe regimen entails "rigorous isolation, assignment preferably to hard manual labor, a long working day, the reckoning of working days according to less favorable rules" (The Soviet State and the Law, 1957, no. 12).

All this corresponds very closely to the severe regimen long since applied in the corrective labor camps to certain categories of forced labor, especially to those convicted for "crimes against the state," for "acts of banditry," or for such as "relatives of traitors to the fatherland," "socially dangerous elements," or "those suspected of espionage." To realize this, one has only to compare the present rules for the severe regimen with those of the severe regimen in the camps of the past, as described by a former inspector: heavier guard and stricter internal control, movements under guard, even within the camp, limitations on the use of detainees in their specialty and for technical and administrative tasks, assignment to non-specialized manual labor, special restriction of or even complete deprivation of the rights to mail, visits, and packages, as well as to have money, minute supervision by the special section (secret police), outfit of inferior quality, more rigorous repression of violations of the rules committed in the camp (cf. L'Institution concentrationnaire en Russie, 1930-1957, pp. 158-159).

The increase in the number of prisons and the introduction of forced labor into them are the only significant changes which have been made to the concentration system since the reforms of 1954. It is true that these reforms, decided on after the strikes in the camps, did not immediately have their full effect. After all, the reduction of the number of detainees was extended over several years. The progressive thinning-out of manpower which resulted probably brought to the forced laborers certain material improvements.

In this sense, one can speak of reforms after 1954. But at the same time, in the course of the last few years the authorities have rescinded, at least partially, certain earlier reforms. Thus, the prisoner's pay, or rather the portion of it remaining after various deductions, is no longer paid in cash; to

enable the administration to control better the use of their funds by the detainees, a system of deposits was introduced (The Soviet Law of Corrective Labor, p. 186). Similarly, the regulation according to which the day of work counts for more than a day of detention if the production norm is reached or surpassed has been placed in question. This regulation, revoked in 1939, was re-established in 1948 for the "ordinary prisoners" and was extended to political convicts after the great strikes. But in 1953, it was proclaimed that no detainee had a right to such a reckoning of working days; instead this was a favor to be granted individually by the administration. At the same time, its effect was reduced and made to vary according to the categories of detainees: in the case of those convicted of "dangerous crimes against the state and other serious crimes," a day of work might count at a maximum for a day and a half of detention; for other prisoners, the equation might be extended to two days of detention at a maximum (*ibid.*, pp. 254-255). Previously the maximum had been three days for everyone (Soviet Justice, 1957, no. 5).

The reorganization of camps into colonies, insofar as it may have taken place, therefore goes no further than a mere change of name, although the spokesmen of power claim that the nature of the sentence itself has been modified. If one were to believe them, the sentence is henceforth intended principally to re-educate the delinquent. It is true that, from 1954 on, they introduced general instruction, occupational training, radio, and film showings in the camps; they devoted themselves to encouraging various cultural activities, setting up athletic fields, etc. But innovations of this type will obviously not change the nature of the sentence: the Soviet theoreticians do not themselves believe it will and Professor Outevsky has written:

The resulting achievement of the task of re-educating the convicts does not mean that the task of punishment disappears from the work of the institutions of corrective labor. . . . The very act of seeing a contradiction between punishment and education constitutes an error (The Soviet State and the Law, 1957, No. 3).

At the meeting on the law of corrective labor in May 1957, a well-known lawyer stated that "in the work of the institutions of corrective labor, there are always present, independently of the character of these institutions, elements of punishment which only attain the educational goal in the last analysis, and principally by means of coercion" (*ibid.*, 1957, no. 12). The Soviet Law of Corrective Labor expresses the same idea:

The strict and compulsory execution of the requirements of the regimen by the detainees of the Soviet institutions of confinement, and the application of disciplinary sanctions against those who violate them, have an educational value: they habituate to discipline and self-discipline (p. 97).

If the concentration camps do not at all resemble an educational institution, the insistence placed on reform and re-education serves on the other hand as a pretext for the recruitment among the prisoners of stool-pigeons and other agents of the administration. The councils of detainees, long since neglected, were revived in 1954 and reorganized from 1958 on. According to the official definition, this organization "helps the administration achieve the task of reforming and re-educating the detainees, and directly participates in the development among them of socialist competition, of the struggle for a healthy way of life (sic) and a fruitful use of leisure time, as well as for the exposure of parasitic elements."

The council, which meets in the presence of representatives of the administration, is able to furnish information on the prisoners whom the administration is proposing to release on parole before the end of their sentence, "as well as in other circumstances, when it is a matter of describing the personality of a detainee, his attitude to the work, his conduct, and his participation in social activities." In their turn, the members of the council recruit other informers. They organize specialized sections which work under the direction of the corresponding sections of the administration; the members of these sections, who are supposed to be confirmed in their position by the administration, are chosen among the "activist detainees." At the same time, the council is supposed to surround itself with a vast group of collaborators (*aktiv*). The job, which consists of recruiting for the administration informants of all kinds, is made easier by the fact that the council may suggest to the chiefs that they grant favors to particular detainees, brigades, or detachments.



There is more yet: the council takes direct part in repression. It may itself examine the violations committed by the detainees and inflict on them certain sanctions or "address a request to the administration if it is appropriate to apply stricter measures." Further, since 1955 there has been established in association with the council a "comrades' court" for examining the violations which are referred to it by the council or the administration, or which it takes up on its own initiative. After 1956, they began to organize sections or brigades "for the maintenance of public order," recruited from among the convicts (The Soviet Law of Corrective Labor, pp. 212-214).

#### The Trend of Development

On the whole, the present situation of the concentration camps is very clear. Because of the population crisis and as a result of the uprisings of the prisoners, the whole system has tended for some years to decline. In spite of the immediate difficulties, the authorities have not, however, lost sight of further objectives. While dropping ballast, they have done everything to safeguard, through the critical period, the essence of the institution. The possibility remains to give to this institution a new direction when a more favorable situation arises.

This has not yet happened. It may even be that the crisis of the camps will grow more acute. At least there is no reason to suppose that the reforms have achieved their objective, that the concentration system has found a new equilibrium.

The efforts to make forced labor more efficient have not been crowned with success. True, trade school courses were set up in the camps from 1953-54 on and it was declared desirable that prisoners should be used, to the extent possible, in conformity with their occupational qualifications. But to proclaim such a principle is one thing, to apply it in the concentration camps is another. Repression furnishes the manpower, and its use is predetermined by the decisions assigning each convict to his regimen of detention (it has been seen, for example, that hard manual labor forms an integral part of the severe regimen). These decisions take no more account of occupational abilities than was done at the time of arrest. It is necessary to add that the Soviet camps have a long tradition of squandering human resources. Thus one reads in The Soviet Law of Corrective Labor:

If it appears for any reason impossible to assign the detainee to work according to his specialty, the corrective labor institution will assign him to other types of work and have him acquire another specialty (p. 189).

It would probably be close to the truth to guess that, in practice, courses in occupational training serve mainly to prepare for specialized hard labor men whose specialized qualifications remain unused.

Consequently, it is not surprising to see remaining the old concentration camp concept of professional capacities based solely on the muscular strength of the prisoners. On arriving at the camp, the convicts pass before a medical commission which classes them in four groups: ready for "work under general conditions," for light labor, for invalid labor, and finally, incapable of work (ibid., pp. 176 and 189). The only difference in comparison with the past is that in the recent past there were five categories in place of four.

The organization of work, for its part, is apparently quite as simple as before the reforms. The evaluation of work accomplished continues to be made solely in terms of "productive norms" (ibid., p. 220). There is no trace, in the official sources, of any consideration being given to the quality of the product. Besides, the detainees continue to be divided into brigades whose members remain a unit not only for work, but also at meals in the quarters. The brigadier, a prisoner chosen by the administration, continues to exert over his men the same excessive power, a constant source of injustice for as long as the camps of corrective labor have existed (ibid., pp. 192 and 217).

The measures taken in the course of the years 1951 to 1954 to stimulate forced labor production were not developed thereafter. Some of them even underwent serious limitation. In this regard, mention has already been made of the limitations made on the reduction of sentences, as well as of the ending of the payment of wages in cash.

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The transferral of the enterprises connected with the camps to the control of the responsible economic administrations, begun in 1953, has not been widespread (cf. *ibid.*, pp. 187-188). Now, among all the actions taken in the last dozen years to increase the efficiency of the exploitation of manpower in the camps, the decision to assign the economic enterprises to the control of organizations independent of the police might have been perhaps the most fruitful. No doubt experience will show that it is impossible to reconcile economic efficiency and terror.

The reduction of the numbers detained makes it difficult to exploit distant regions, populated mainly by convicts and former convicts. Much reliance was placed, for assuring a continuity of effort, on the elimination of wastage. Any check suffered in this field is all the more serious since the campaigns intended to fill out the manpower of these concentration areas by an influx of non-convict workers have not achieved the desired results, in spite of the advantages promised and the pressures brought to bear (cf. *L'Institution concentrationnaire en Russie, 1930-1957*, pp. 367-373). Hence the necessity to reactivate the policy of deportations which has been evidenced by the return to administrative condemnation.

This procedure had been abandoned on 1 September 1953, the date of the dissolution of the famous "Special Board" of the Ministry of Interior (*Party Life*, 1957, no. 4). Already in the course of the year 1957, the Federated Republics one after the other adopted a new law authorizing groups of citizens, district committees, and village soviets to banish to compulsory labor, for periods from two to five years, "adult and physically fit adults" who have "a parasitical and antisocial mode of life". This procedure had in view, among others, the peasants on the collective farms who do more work on their allotments than on the kolkhoz fields (cf. *L'Institution concentrationnaire en Russie, 1930-1957*, pp. 379-381). A decree "On the strengthening of the struggle against those who avoid socially useful work and who follow an anti-social and parasitic way of life" was promulgated by the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR on 4 May 1961. The persons referred to -- as well as those who earn a living by means of their personal automobiles, or by exploiting the land around their house or their allotment of land, or yet the workers who "undermine labor discipline" -- may be sent for two to five years to specially designated localities, and may be forced to work there. The sentence may be levied by the district or city court, or against wage earners or collective farmers, by the employees of an enterprise, of a factory, of an institution, of an organization, of a collective farm, or of a collective farm brigade (*Official Journal of the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR*, 1961, no. 18).

On the other hand, numerous signs indicate that they have not succeeded -- to date in achieving the necessary condition for the perpetuation of the concentration system: the destruction of that solidarity among the convicts and that spirit of resistance which were the source of the uprisings of 1953-1954.

The creation of the councils of detainees, of the comrades' courts, and the sections or brigades for the maintenance of public order does not by any means indicate that the heavy losses suffered by the networks of stool-pigeons at the hands of the secret organizations have been filled; one would, on the contrary, be inclined to see in the attention given by the penal administration to such organizations [as the councils, courts, etc.] a sign of their check.

Moreover, the decree of 5 May 1961 on the extension of the application of capital punishment indicates that terrorist acts against the tools of the administration recruited among the prisoners have not ended. By virtue of this decree, the supreme penalty henceforth threatens, among others, "multiple offenders who are particularly dangerous, and other persons convicted of serious crimes who, in the places of penal detention, terrorize the prisoners who have taken the path of reform"; the same threat has been made to those "who organize to this end criminal groups or who participate actively in such groups;" that is, the founders and active members of the secret organizations.

By analogy with the past, it is possible to deduce that the activity of the convicts against the "sheep" has not decreased: in the Spring of 1953, when the activity of clandestine groups hit its stride and the great uprisings were about to break out, the police attempted to protect their informants by circulating in all the camps an order that each convict was supposed to sign and which stated that the murder of a prisoner by his fellow prisoners would be punished by death (Joseph Scholmer: *La Greve de Vorkouta*, Paris 1954, p. 157).

It even appears, in the light of the decree of 5 May 1961, that terrorist action directed against the stool-pigeons is not the only danger the authorities are concerned about. The text prescribes the application of the death penalty to "multiple offenders...who...commit attacks against the administration or who organize criminal groups for this purpose...." It is impossible to be mistaken about it: the decree which amends recent laws, promulgated in December 1958, is intended to repress uprisings in the camps and the prisons. No doubt the possibility of such events must have considerably increased since December 1958 for such amendments to be judged necessary.

The ferocity of such rules shows at the same time the determination of the Soviet power to maintain the concentration system, cost what it may.